

## Discouraging the Practice of Tobacco Initiation among Children and Adolescents through Promoting of Smoke-free Films

Dear Editor,

Globally, smoking has been acknowledged as one of the first preventable causes of morbidity and mortality, with tobacco being the only legal drug that kills half of its users across the world.<sup>[1]</sup> In fact, the recent estimates suggest that tobacco use in different forms accounts for almost 6 million deaths annually.<sup>[1]</sup> Further, almost 50% of these deaths have been reported from developing nations.<sup>[1,2]</sup>

From time immemorial, films have always remained an easy channel for the tobacco companies to advertise their products or ensure propagation of tobacco products.<sup>[2]</sup> In fact, since the imposition of strict restrictions on tobacco advertising, films is one of the last resorts to expose millions of adolescents worldwide to smoking imagery.<sup>[2]</sup> Moreover, tobacco use in any form usually starts at younger ages, and hence, films showing the use of tobacco products have attracted millions of youth to initiate smoking worldwide.<sup>[1,2]</sup>

Further, whenever a film star smokes in a blockbuster film, it adds value to smoking.<sup>[2,3]</sup> Adolescents who go for films also wish to do the same either as a curiosity or imitation of their favorite stars.<sup>[2,3]</sup> In fact, a direct association between smoking in films and various factors such as a positive attitude toward smoking, motivation for smoking initiation, and acts against the desire to quit or not smoke has been observed.<sup>[2-4]</sup>

In addition, smoking imagery was found in excess of 30% of the films released in nations such as the United States, Iceland, and Mexico in 2014.<sup>[2]</sup> Smoking imagery in films is a strong form of promotion of tobacco products and is strictly against the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which legally imposes a ban on tobacco advertising-promotion-sponsorship.<sup>[1]</sup>

To counter the problem of films showing smoking scenes, the WHO has called for the governments to rate films (viz., age-wise categorization) which portray tobacco use.<sup>[2]</sup> In addition, interventions such as ensuring no display of tobacco brands in films, making it mandatory to show strong anti-smoking advertisements before the film starts across all forms of distribution, compulsory certification from film producer that they have received nothing in exchange for using or displaying tobacco products in the film, and ensuring that media productions that promote smoking should get no public subsidies.<sup>[2-4]</sup> Simultaneously, strategies have even been proposed for the older films such as adding warning labels and anti-tobacco messages in them.<sup>[2]</sup>

To conclude, a strict restriction of smoking imagery in films will eventually benefit multiple nations owing to the

global distribution of films. Hence, a collaborative effort from multiple nations is the critical element to eventually prevent children and adolescents from starting to smoke or use other tobacco products.

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

**Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava,  
Prateek Saurabh Shrivastava,  
Jegadeesh Ramasamy**

*Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu, India*

### Address for correspondence:

*Dr. Saurabh RamBihariLal Shrivastava,  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College and Research Institute, Ammapettai Village, Thiruporur - Guduvancherry Main Road, Sembakkam Post, Kancheepuram - 603 108, Tamil Nadu, India.  
E-mail: drshrishri2008@gmail.com*

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